

Creating a Mentoring Culture

Hallmarks of a Mentoring Culture

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More than ever before, organizations, large and small, are looking outside traditional mentoring paradigms to raise the bar on the practice of mentoring by creating a mentoring culture.

A mentoring culture continuously focuses on building the mentoring capacity, competence, and capability of the organization. A mentoring culture encourages the practice of mentoring excellence by continuously:

- creating readiness for mentoring within the organization,
- facilitating multiple mentoring opportunities, and
- building in support mechanisms to ensure individual and organizational mentoring success.

In a mentoring culture, eight hallmarks build on and strengthen each other. All are present, at least to some degree; however they manifest themselves differently depending on the organization's previous success with mentoring. When each hallmark is consistently present, the mentoring culture is fuller and more robust. As more and more of each hallmark is found in an organization, the mentoring culture becomes progressively more sustainable.

The Eight Hallmarks of a Mentoring Culture

- **Accountability.** Accountability enhances performance and produces long-lasting results. It requires shared intention, responsibility and ownership, a commitment to action and consistency of practice. Accountability also involves very specific tasks:
 - setting goals,
 - clarifying expectations,
 - defining roles and responsibilities,
 - monitoring progress and measuring results,
 - gathering feedback, and
 - formulating action goals.
- **Alignment.** Alignment focuses on the consistency of mentoring practices within an institution's culture. It builds on the assumption that a cultural fit already exists between mentoring and the organization and that mentoring initiatives are also tied to goals larger than just initiating a program. When mentoring is aligned within the culture, it is part of its DNA. A shared understanding and vocabulary of mentoring practice exists that fits naturally with the organization's values, practices, mission, and goals.
- **Communication.** Communication is fundamental to achieving mentoring excellence and positive mentoring results. Its effects are far-reaching; it increases trust, strengthens relationships, and helps align organizations. It creates value, visibility and demand for mentoring. It is also the catalyst for developing mentoring readiness, generating learning opportunities, and providing mentoring support within an organization.
- **Value and Visibility.** Sharing personal mentoring stories, role modeling, reward, recognition, and celebration are high leverage activities that create and sustain value and visibility. Leaders who talk about formative mentoring experience, share best practices, and promote and support mentoring by their own example add to the value proposition for mentoring.
- **Demand.** Demand for mentoring has a multiplier effect. When it is present, there is a mentoring buzz, increased interest in mentoring, and self-perpetuating participation. Employees seek mentoring as a way to strengthen and develop themselves and look for mentoring opportunities.

Mentors become mentees and mentees become mentors. Employees engage in multiple mentoring relationships, often simultaneously. Demand spurs reflective conversation and dialogue about mentoring adding to its value and visibility.

- **Multiple Mentoring Opportunities.** In a mentoring culture, there is no single approach, type or option for mentoring. Although some mentoring activity goes on in nearly every organization, most need to work at creating a culture that concurrently advances and supports multiple types of opportunities. For example, many organizations couple group mentoring with one-on-one mentoring; the learning from one reinforces the other.
- **Education and Training.** Continuing mentoring education and training opportunities are strategically integrated into the organization's overall training and development agenda. Existing training platforms support mentoring and vice versa. Opportunities for "next step" and renewal education and advanced skill training are available for "veteran" mentors. Networking and support groups meet regularly to exchange best practices and promote peer learning.
- **Safety Nets.** Mentoring cultures establish safety nets to overcome or avoid potential stumbling blocks and roadblocks with minimum repercussion and risk. Safety nets provide just in time support that enables mentoring to move forward coherently. Organizations that proactively anticipate challenges are more likely to establish resilient and responsive mentoring safety nets than those that do not.

A mentoring culture is a vivid expression of an organization's vitality. Its presence enables an organization to augment learning, maximize time and effort, and better utilize its resources. The relationship skills learned through mentoring benefit relationships throughout the organization; as these relationships deepen, people feel more connected to the organization. Ultimately, the learning that results creates value for the entire organization.